/234 cont./
621 circumcisions are the occasion for rejoicings, which last each
632 time for several days, and in which first place is given to
*634 nocturnal dances (2).
796
535

2. Sitte und Recht /Custom and Law/, pp. 10-15.

[834] The "ahwach," the "tahwacht," the "assega," such are the dances that throughout the mountains put the young men and the women and girls in each other's presence in two opposite ranks.

796 The spectacle of these festivities is one of the most attrac-
• 53 tive in Berbère /Berber/ country. In the middle of each of the ranks are found the poets, the "reis en ndam," who improvise. The dancers, closely serried, shoulder to shoulder, begin with an invocation to God, then sing the lines of the poet in chorus, in a little musical phrase repeated indefinitely. Each line is taken up again and repeated by the two ranks until the moment when its answer is found; the rhythm is given by two tambourines, by the clapping of hands, a regular balancing of the body, and the noise of the heels, which strike the ground in cadence. As long as the poets wish, the song is prolonged, taken up again by the two choruses. Little by little the rhythm accelerates, the hand clapping is accelerated on the theme of the last line; for a few minutes bodies move in a frenetic, but perfectly cadenced dance; then suddenly, without a signal, the "ahwach" stops in the greatest silence.

Each poem is sung and danced for about a quarter of an hour; a few minutes of rest, the performance begins again and continues for long hours.

Most often the "ahwach" and especially the "assega" begin /235/ after sunset, on the stone threshing-floors, by the light of big fires over which the "reis" come to stretch the skins of their [361] tambourines. The village plaza, surrounded by secular walnut trees, lends its cadre to the festival. Around the two ranks of dancers the whole "taqbilt" is gathered, eyes fixed on the strongest

/235 cont./

796 .53 warriors, on the most beautiful girls. Behind the spectators, the fantastic shadows of the big trees move in the glimmer of the glowing coals. Then, in the calm mountain night, the moon rises and comes to light this scene, barbaric and graceful at the same time. The nostalgic melody of the choruses carries along the dance, and the faces, sometimes so rude and so closed, are transfigured; in the middle of the rank of the women, dressed in white, adorned with their crude silver jewelry, shine the most resolute girls, who lead the song, their heads crowned with flowers. The young men, the notables themselves, become emboldened to answer their lines. Finally, the "reis" improvise, celebrate the combats of years gone by, the glory of the patron saints of the Sous, faithfulness to the alliances, the price of liberty.

*634 571 796 182 All the life of the "taqbilt" is concentrated for one night around the fires stirred up until dawn, and whose brightness gives to all, at the same time as the illusion of beauty, confidence in the strength of the reconciled families. Thus there go to sleep for a few hours the passions and vengeances whose constant threat can break up the little Berbère /Berber/ state and which are revived in the morning in the mediocre existence of the day.

*634 796 571 616 182 619 Besides these village rejoicings that are part of the life of the "taqbilt," there exist, as we have said, other more warlike festivities, those of the "tinoubga," in which the "Aït Tskawin" figure. It is there that the alliances of the leffs grow closer. The great maraboutic "mousem," such as those of Lalla ᶜAziza of the Seksawa, of Sidi Brahim Ou ᶜAli of the Ida Ou Tanan, and of Sidi Ahmed Ou Mousa of the Tazerwalt, are the occasion of still larger gatherings, in which all the divided tribes and fractions can meet in peace. The opposing leffs thus get to settle their disputes amicably amidst the festivities, dances, and feasts under the protection of the great saints of the Sous.

000 X. The Berbère /Berber/ republics of the Haut-Guir, of the Dibala, of the Branès. -- The life of the Berbère /Berber/ communities, independent of /236/ or imperfectly subject to the